

Native converts
Sooboonagam Ammal
Hindu Lady's Story of her Conversion
1836

A Hindu Lady's Story of Her Conversion.

NEARLY four years ago a great stir was made among high-caste Hindus in Madras by the conversion to Christianity and baptism of a young Hindu lady of position and influence, in connection with the work of the Methodist Episcopal Mission in that city. The story of the steps by which she was led out of Hinduism into the fold of Christ has already been given to the public in an admirable biographical sketch from the pen of Miss Grace Stephens. This booklet has been widely read. It is a fascinating story of spiritual enlightenment and of the salvation of a true seeker after God. The name of this interesting lady is Sooboonagam Ammal. She is now a happy Christian, and useful worker in the Mission, and is making rapid progress in many directions. It was expected that she would attend the Cawnpore Epworth League Convention as a delegate from Madras, but was hindered by possible difficulties of travel on a long journey owing to plague inspection, etc. She however sent the following deeply interesting

letter, which was read at the Convention. It is printed as it was written :

METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZENANA MISSION,
MADRAS, 30-9-1899.

DEAR FRIENDS : Although I am not able to be present with you all at this beautiful Convention, I like to tell you about my conversion—how God showed me His Light.

Her Early Days.

Up to age of twelve, I never believed in any God. I had only in my mind my wealth, my father's affliction, and I was very proud. Soon after my father died, and when he died my people thought of getting me married. So at the close of the twelfth year nearly ten thousand rupees were spent for the wedding which lasted for fifteen days. Although everything seemed very bright and beautiful, but inside I was not happy. After I was married I was made to worship idols every day.

When I was fourteen I gave up everything else and devoted my life and my time to idol worship, and in my own room I had twenty-five pictures of different kinds of idols and some silver, gold, and brass pots for the gods. There was one special large picture in the center of

the room which costed me two hundred rupees to make. The name of the picture was "Subiramoney" or "Thandaryathaponey." I used to give most of my time to praying to this god.

Visits and Gifts for the Temple.

There was a small Temple of this god at Kadambakum (a few miles away from Madras), but I enlarged the Temple and I made a Sacred Tank for this idol, called "Serayanapymay," which means "holy water." All this costed me a great deal but my mother was willing to give me all that I wanted to spend on the idols. Every Friday morning I used to visit this Temple. Before going I used to send by my servant four measures of milk to anoint and bathe the idol and keep the sacred milk for me. At four o'clock in the evening I would leave my house and reach the temple at five; then I would bathe in the Sacred Tank, and after walking round the Temple fifty times I would go in and worship the idol. A little of that sacred milk I used to give the poor "Pandarums" (people who belong to the Temple); then I used to drink some milk. Next morning I come home and commence worshiping my idols and pictures at home.

Earnestly Seeking Salvation.

For the sake of salvation I made five vows :

1. That I would burn a million lights in three months.

2. That I must place a lakh of flowers with prayers on the picture of "Subiramoney" within fourteen days.

3. That I would give to the poor Brahmin women one lakh of pieces of Safferon within fourteen days.

4. That I feed poor Brahmin men and women separately once in twenty-five days and once in fourteen days.

5. That during these days I fasted. I never used to take anything else but a little milk. After all this my mother thought that I was like a god's wife and called me "million lights."

But I want to tell you that inside me there was no happiness or brightness. On account of this worship I wanted to learn Tamil, because I have to use some letters before the gods in ashes.

How the Light Came.

Then I was seeking for a teacher, but my Heavenly Father sent me a Bible woman of Miss Stephenses. Mrs. Jones and the Bible woman came and visited me very often. Some-

times I used to learn, sometimes I could not learn. But my mother told me not learn the Bible from them. I told my mother I have to learn the Bible, for the sake of my Tamil. I won't listen to them. I would hear it all with one ear and leave it off with the other ear.

One day I was very troubled in my heart. Although I was doing many things for the idols but my sins were not forgiven me. That time dear sister Mrs. Jones came to visit me. She took the Mark's Gospel, 2 chapter, and part of the 5th verse, that Jesus said to the palsied man "arise, take up thy bed and walk, and thy sins be forgiven thee." These words made me very happy. Joy come to my heart and I thought I must leave off worshiping idols and do as Bible tells me because the Bible is true. Jesus can take my sins away.

My people wanted me to stop studying from missionary ladies, and they want to send me away to Bangalore. But God is good to me. He put it in my heart to write to Miss Stephens several letters and tell her everything about myself. So I did. Each letter I used to give my servant a rupee so as not tell to my mother. But I was very frightened to leave my home.

She Gives up All for Christ.

During this time a great festival was to take place in our home. I did not like to worship the idol because I did not believe in it, but my mother begged me to worship. Just as I was getting ready God sent a scorpion to sting me in my finger: then I was not able to worship and I thanked God myself.

In this way I used to be tempted to worship idols. So I prayed to God to take me to Miss Stephens' home because I did not believe in idols worship any more. I often disappointed Miss Stephens. I used to write to her quietly and I say I am coming to stay with her. But after all, God brought me here. On a Christmas Eve, 1895, at seven o'clock, I left my heathen home and dear mother and people for Christ—*all for Christ*. I coming all the way it seemed very long to me and I was very frightened. Miss Stephens did not expect me. I at once ran upstairs and made her both frightened and happy.

Her People Pronounced Her Dead.

My people searching for me but could not find me. Afterward they came to the Mission Home and gave Miss Stephens, Mrs. Jones, and me plenty of trouble and they got very angry with us; they called me an outcaste and tempted

me by saying that if I go back to them they will give me more than I had before, and they promised to build me a separate home, but by the help of God I made up my mind not go back to heathenism—I must be a faithful Christian worker for the Master. My people made a funeral service for me, and my mother went to Benares to wash in the Ganges to make herself holy because her daughter has lost caste. They think that I am dead to them, but I thank God that I am living for the Master's work.

Her New Life in Christ.

Five weeks after my coming out I was baptized in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vepery. The next Sunday I was taken on in the church. When I took my first communion, Rev. and Mrs. Mansell were with us in Madras. From Miss Stephens I have learned what prayer is. Prayer helps me very much; without prayer I don't know what I would do.

How glad I am to do some work for the Lord. I go to the zenana homes and the villages, and teach and sing and read and explain the Bible to them, and very often I give my testimony to them, who I was and how I became a Christian. I love my zenana work and village work very much, and some of the woman like

me very much and they were very interested in my coming out, because they want to follow the Saviour whom I followed. I have village Sunday schools and I love to tell them about Christ and his love. I always like to prepare my Sunday school lessons before I go to them, because if I did not receive the Holy Spirit in my heart I cannot tell them much about Christ's love.

Testimony after Four Years of Experience.

Now, my friends, I want to give you my testimony. Jesus is the same yesterday and to-day and forever to me. I feel that whatever work He gives me I will do, whatever He leads me I will follow because He knew me from the beginning. I am trusting Him all the time, He is preparing for me everything—my times are in his hands. *Christ is all and all in all to me.* I will pray very much for you all during this Convention, that God will pour His Holy Spirit upon you all. May God bless you all abundantly. I beg you all to remember me in your prayers also.

Your sister in Christ,
SOOBOONAGAM AMMAL.

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